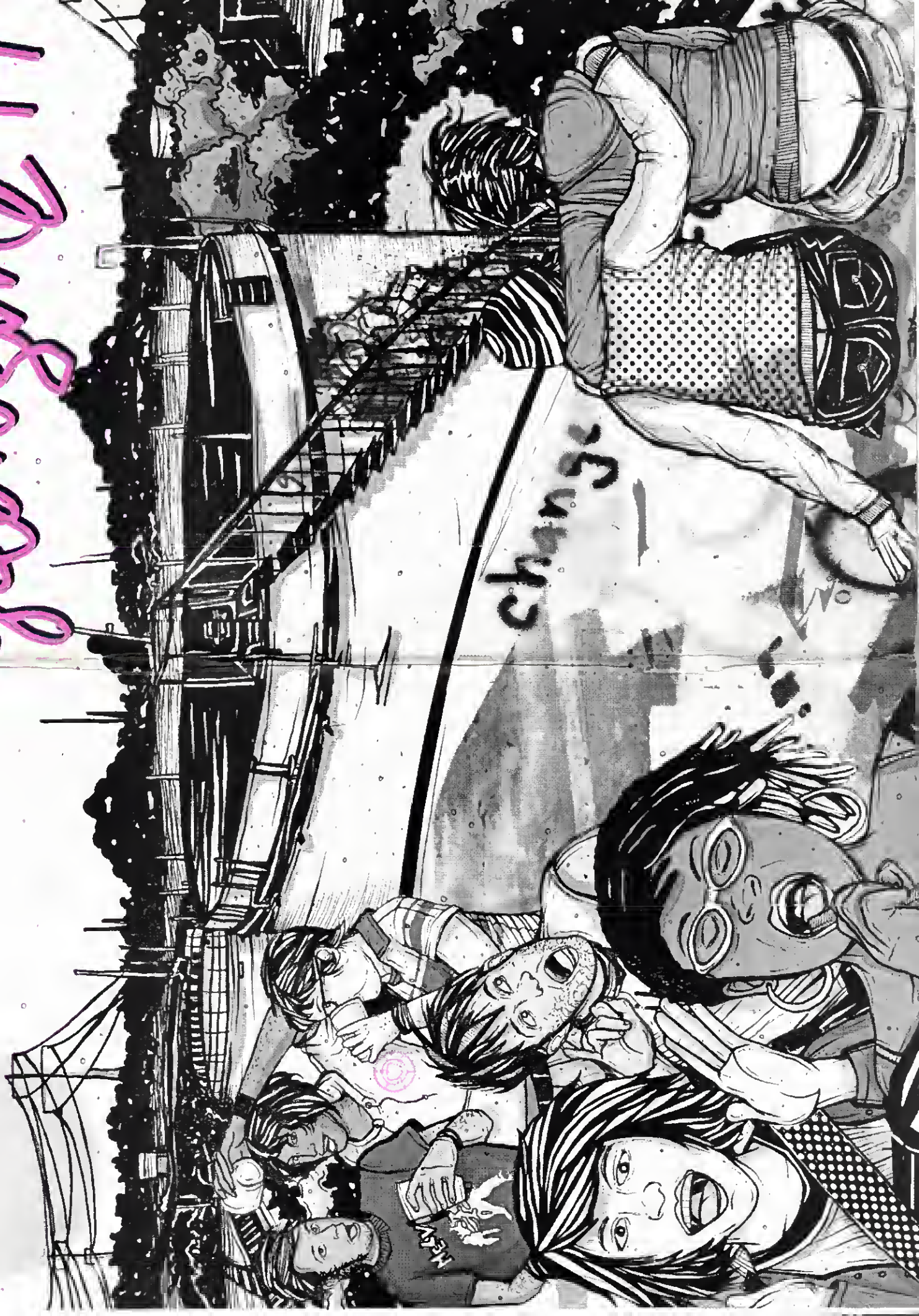
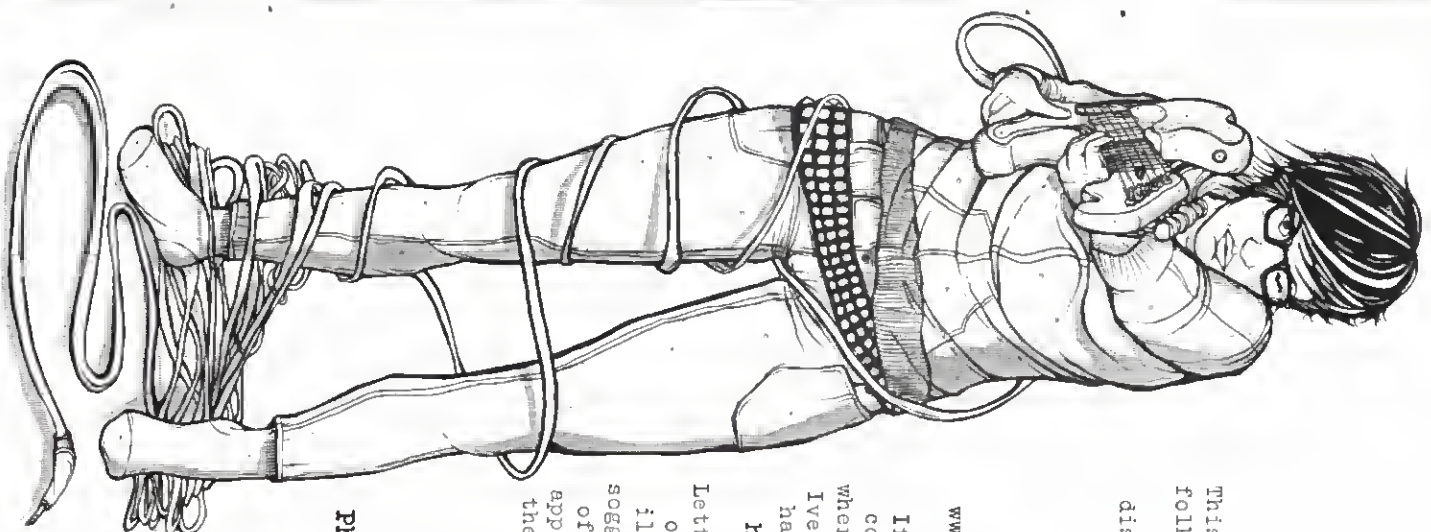


Hi Wisconsin



This zine was put together by me, Cindy. Not a whole lot of stories and drew the pictures. They aren't supposed to be representative of an ideal community - they're drawings of people who happen to know people who inspire me. The zine was put together within the course of one year, a caffeine overdose, a few fond embraces, my favorite records, some nervous breakdowns, a thirteen hour party, sixteen wrong decisions, twelve right ones, four cities, two states, and one coastline.



This zine was published by the folks at Microcosm Publishing. If you would want to distribute Greenzine, get in touch with them.

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If you can get access to a computer, I have a webpage where you can look at drawings I've made and other projects I have available to everyone.

<http://www.croadcore.org>

Letters, stories, propositions on the basis of freelance illustration, random notes, SOGGY sandwiches, and anything of the like is welcomed and appreciated. Send anything to the address below. Thank you for reading this far.

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Thank you ^{TO MY HOMEMATES, FLORIDA POSSE,}
^{AND FORMER HOUSEMATES. TO}
^{MY FRIENDS IN INDIANA, NEW YORK,}
 FLORIDA, PENNSYLVANIA, CALIFORNIA, MISSISSIPPI, OREGON,
 TEXAS, VIRGINIA, KENTUCKY, ARKANSAS, DC, TORONTO, PARO,
 LONDON, CUBA, COLORADO AND TENNESSEE. I FUCKING MISS YOU.
 TO MY FRIENDS WHO ANTICIPATED THE SAME THINGS AS ME
 IN 1997 AND STILL CALL ME ON THE PHONE-FOR JOES,
 AFFECTION, AND REDEMPTION. FOR MY FRIENDS WHO FEEL
 THE NEED TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES OF MOVEMENTS AND
 IDEAS THEY NEVER IDENTIFIED WITH, TO MY FRIENDS
 WHO WANT TO LEARN HOW TO SUPPORT ME AND EACH OTHER
 TO EDUCATION. WE HAVE A LONG WAY- BUT WE'LL GET SOME
 WHERE. TO MY FAVORITE BANDS WHO PUT UP WITH ME
 ON TOUR AND GIVE ME SEASONAL ANTHEMS. TO QUEER
 BARS. TO THE SOCIALIST WHO SAID FIDEL RUINED
 SOCIALISM. TO MY FAMILY AND HOW THEY DIDN'T LET
 ME DYE MY HAIR UNTIL I LEARNED TO ADORE MY
 ROOTS- THE ONES ON MY HEAD AND THE ONES ABOUT
 CULTURE. TO WEST PHILLY AND THE PEOPLE WHO ARE
 GIVING ME SPACE TO SPEAK, TO CREATING A SPACE
 THAT'S SAFE. TO TALKING ABOUT SEX AND THE
 ROMANTICIZING OF SELF LOVE AND MASTURBATION.
 TO FOOD, COMPASSION, AND THE CORNER STORE.

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- V. Salvation, at last: New york, new love, new means for new cities and old, old porch swings.



Dearest Florida,

I'm seeing seasons for the first time in my life. And I don't hate you for stripping me of that. However, you did give me hurricane season. But I left you behind, bound with something precious. Crowded between your coasts, love letters, pill popping and one another's embrace was our therapy. A lot can happen in 22 years, but I didn't think too much could happen in just one. So I chose to leave now - and what remains are tight new friends in the shape of distance.

These are our ashes - they're booming and the changes are gorgeous. I remember when I hated you and overturning a year's weight in retaliation was a constant mind fuck. I thought I'd trade you in for Richmond, VA. I condemned you - until my grandmother would call, yelling in Spanish, eulogizing my ability to be slutty, singing heavily accented green day songs to me. So I decided to come back. I'm glad you should see I could change. And if it wasn't for coming back - I maybe wouldn't have made it this far.

And if I love someone, I set them free. So I'm glad we're saying goodbye at this seamless point in time. I found a house near hills - not the rolling kind, the west Philly kind with row houses and families. I found moments that will make much more sense in reality than in the boundaries of my hopes.

But alas, we all know - it'll never be the same, and I don't compare living situations - they are all unique and exceptional in their own way. And it might not be over stolen beers by a Gulf Coast sunset - but we'll meet again. We'll grow in unison - we'll write letters, exchange visits, talk dirty on the phone, and realize that no - not all good things come to an end. They just change. And we soon realize that change is the only constant. I'm excited that we are changing together.

Love,
Cristy C. Road

Dearest Pennsylvania,

My first time here was out of retreat - I held a vendetta against Florida and needed the kind of support only you could give me. Your interstates were open arms, and your open doors were watering holes where I met a new family. My clothing was covered in sawdust, I reeked of a sinus infection, and the headstock of my guitar had just broken off - but you didn't allow me to worry. This new solace came in the shape of naked dance parties, ten to a shower, wide smiles, all cans embraced by urban pioneers, and all night access to rooftops where I would consistently find a hand waiting to be held. For a time longer than expected you embodied those idealist fantasies - the ones ingrained in a youthful radical's intent to remain nineteen forever. I would show up on your brightest nights and capture photographs of only your good side. You taught me life was enraged - but easily mended. You taught me that true love is rough, yet young, sweet, and tender. And in that time of learning - I believed a lot of lies - you just can't find a utopia. You taught me about confronting my mental health, and confronting the fact that two loves often raped by manipulation. You taught me that a home can come consume the best and worst times of your life.

I loved to love the way that I was always welcomed by inside jokes and friends with chocolate. But since my first visit on that cold spring night three years back - we have all grown together. We have all sat through a year of burning bridges and seeing friends die. We've all been bleak and blamed a quarter life crisis. We've all cursed you and threatened to leave you (staying through your turn of a century studio). And although it always remains uncertain how long I would call this home - you soon gave us spring and like the leaves on the maple beside our porch - we stopped condemning you and experienced positive change. You taught us to never give up, and with that hopefulness, this sometimes bitter romance only gets stronger.

Love,
Cristy C. Road

trolley on Chester that ran all night, and a few fireflies adding character to our silhouettes. Stirring within me were those manic intervals- the ones of motivation that I always chose over my occasional hollow slump. Those that validated the substance encased in my ribcage. In my eyes, the heart was a muscle that blossomed by way of movement rather than contentment. This muscle raised a sense of unrest that my often weak wrists could never lift.

The realization that kindled my impulse is the one that said I wasn't alone in this lifelong quest. That quest about hope and an agenda that went beyond a radical cliché. Inside, I knew we could surpass the elite, naive revolution that many people nauseatingly romanticize. And while engaged in that new hope for adulthood- we would maintain that youthfulness that keeps us rsiterating lines about how much life ruled that year. I still hadn't seen autumn yet, but I was glad to be on that porch swing that night.



On the first week of my second to last summer in Florida, we had just left the appalachian mountains. From our position on the interstate that sunday, we could hardly see the coastline, but she commented on how amazing it was that we lived in the region where palmettos and oaks intermingled with only a short distance between them. North Carolina was very different than Florida, but I always felt that every region was beautiful in its own way.

I was at a turning point where I decided that I wanted to leave florida.

"When Im out of college and financially capable- Im going to gather my belongings and find a hundred year old house in west Philadelphia with a bunch of inspiring queer vegans who like dance parties, dirty sex, cleaning and singing, durafame logs, sarly nineties punk rock, and popular culture." I said to her.

"I know it cant be all that bad."

And when I thought of home, I thought of Miami. I

thought of heat exhausting winters where I had to systematically peel my sweaty-aes body off any upholstery. I thought of a carnation pink party rental store replacing the haven where I attended my first punk rock show, and all of my old friends stiff on cocaine.

"I hate ths days when you wake up bitter." She said to me.

"I'm not hitter, the weather is fatiguing me.

I think its 237 degrees outside."

A few hours later we reached Sarasota, which was where I was living then. It was only three hours northwest of Miami. And although geographically cloee, it was as culturally distinct from Miami as Kansas City. Sarasota was a segregated, faux-artsy, retirement town with two college campuses. In the last year, the administration of my University had initiated future plans to expand. In other words, they would steal property from the cast-aside, marginal-claes community of Newtown, which surrounded the school.

The people of Newtown emhodied the solace I felt in small southsrn towns through Georgia, that I would stop at during day-long bus rides. An older woman who lived north of the house I lived at would often stop me on my way back from the grocery store to talk about conceptual art, pickled pig's feet, and how we thought the texture of tofu was nasty, although ws ate it anyway. Her lahrador rstriever would often approach me in an attack method, while I would euffer embarrassment when my face would eat shit on the pavement. Despite my being a nuisance- she had the most bsautiful daughter I had ever seen. Her hair was adorned with an array of colorful ribbons lashing together an assortment of mid-length braids. These were the people who helped me appreciate the history and culture of a town I entered blindly for the sake of a college education.

I was graduating in a few short monthe. The days where I could do something about the school's objectives were numbered.

And as much as I set pleas and arranged discussions- I was hardly considered. Summer heat enveloped me, often without asking.

I slouched on the passenger seat and she parked on the bayfront at a quarter to seven. We ran out of the only working car door like squirrels and sat on the concrete ledge that faced the horizon. I held her hand and the sun was setting behind condominiums that I could faintly see. We pretended they were the mountains- and I told her about the little girl who lived up the street from me. She smiled and we kissed. Right then, I distanced myself from a failing relationship with the state of Florida. I thought of the rousing commonalities that allowed me to collect myself. She asked me if it was making out that had allowed me to make that decision- I said these friendships, the sand entwined in each of our toes, and Spanish moss restored my love of Florida. So in a way, yes. And I called Florida home.

In my home I had family, a fervent working class, and the embrace of two coastlines where I could often see the sun both set and rise. In my home I had an outrageous crowd who's allowed me to validate that isolation could never nourish me. In my home I sat beneath the canopy of charmingly fabricated sun-stricken silhouettes.



before me was how growth and movement had encompassed my process of building a new home. And whether or not I commit to a lifetimes of eastern Pennsylvania, shuffle haplessly through cities that endear me, or find a new lasting love- I knew inside what heart I would ruthlessly carry with me- and that was unconditional. And maybe then we would *never* fall from grace.

"How is your friend doing?"

"He's starting chemotherapy today. He's one of the most inspiring people I've ever known. I don't think I could ever be that strong- it makes me cry."

"Your weaknesses?"

"No, his health and how I wish I could be there, supporting him in person. I'm fine with my weaknesses- I learned that it's okay to just be as strong as we can be."

"Hospitals weaken me."

"A friend of ours kept saying that something good could come out of this. So I kept saying how the fuck. But in a way, now I know."

"About what?"

"About embracing life to the fullest- not letting the petty envelope you and finding ways to let trauma fortify you. I thought I knew then, but now I know better. Like, I learned that sometimes I'm depressed. And while bipolar disorder is eating away at my serotonin- I want to try to frustrate anxiously over a great future, instead of haplessly envying my past."

"Good luck."

"Don't get me wrong- sometimes I just don't want to deal with anything- and I know I'm not the only one who has reiterated that line. Remember that day when our biggest worry was the chance of losing one another in the crowd?"

"We found each other. It was beautiful that night."

"Those nights keep me going."

We sat on the front porch that was painted grey, while our neighbor's was electric blue. She was nuzzled in an oversized velvet chair that one of the housemates salvaged from the curb. I sat on the wooden porch swing and tried to articulate myself in some shape of strength.

Learning about inclusiveness, conscious decisions, working against selfishness and coerciveness, trying our hardest to be optimists- this is what we saw from adulthood. Tactfully labeling it a task on a list was ludicrous. This was a lifelong agenda.

The wind grew dull and I couldn't see myself sleeping much that night. Outside were only people waiting for the



It was finally one of the first cold nights that year. My life was arranged in alphabetized rows and piles- this materialized composure was my private method of safety. This is how a routine of educating others and hustling out savvy cut downs to street harassers was consoling rather than inevitable strain. One night she and I sat on the porch and talked about how the summer had been more about learning rather than the debauchery that lives on in hearsay.

I told her how the lapse between despair and delight usually lasts about five minutes for me. I can pinpoint the day that my new life in Philadelphia had fundamentally become the new crank- and then the hour that broke. I knew inside energy, wild parties, sketch comedy, and ghost hunting are substantial parts to my life- but teaching and learning- that was where our growth lay. My loose ends were both frayed and in knots- it had been a few months, and I still couldn't say eye to eye with ambitions, sex, familiarity, and desire. Albeit in shambles, we could move towards something. She agreed.

Through the last four years, I learned about survival from small town constraints and aimless travel. I learned from everything that directed me at every which way but straight- I would stop to tell jokes, make out, and share a meal or two. Right now, stability was substantial. Right now, I wanted to integrate teaching and learning into everything I did. I wanted to take the dialogues I often clutched and the pictures I invest my whole self into and place them on par with the growth of a not subcultural, centralized, or knitted community- but a diverse, widespread, and conscious one. I remembered the potency of Miami, and how I could have been blind to it if it weren't for what my culture, my favorite bands, my keen, obnoxious hormones, my daily exchanges with strangers, and my bestfriends taught me. Now I'm distant- now I'm two thousand miles away. And in a way I want to emulate what I saw from my relatives- my mentors.

We are learning from each other and learning to work with one another. We're understanding one another's weaknesses and supporting one another's desire to combat or support qualities ingrained in us. We're learning how to be easy on the ill-timed sex jokes. I'm learning how to talk about death, depression, and body issues. I'm learning how to be alone and not hate it as much as I often do. I shuffled in my seat and picked my toes- knowing inside that it's always difficult for a person like me to discuss adulthood, rather than merely just let it be. But in a way, our thirst to learn was the heart of these words often tossed- words like change and revolution. And for a while that summer, the only clear reality that lay

After that summer, I moved into a new apartment with Radha, and it was my fourth year living in Sarasota. I would still visit Miami often. A house near little Haiti became one of my favorite houses in North Miami. The doorways were arched, the walls were mint green, and the neighbors often walked inside through their urban garden with interest in what we always did. Some of us

sat outside and sewed puppets together. Some of us repeated obnoxious phrases and sewed together ass-crack baring daisy-dukes and made fucking around seem charming. Some

of us drank home-brewed wine and talked of how fighting was a daily practice. I remember when she said that our ideas and practices were in all our actions- it went beyond the muscle and the physical strain.

A friend of mine said she was moving out of the beautiful house in little Haiti, where she had six friends and a garden in the front yard. And

while we bared the intention to support any disenfranchised community- we knew living there would encase gentrification.

There was that one Zion bakery on the corner of sixty second and third or fourth. I had rarely bought food as amazing as theirs.

This is what we did without the state abusing social integration by gentrification. We shared our projects and showed economic support with the people of Miami, whereas they shared theirs with us.

That October, I was riding in a van and we picked up a hitchhiker named Claude between Miami and Gainesville while driving north. He was clad in anarchistic



I wanted to take these new ideas, draw pictures of them, sing songs about them & talk about them to 16 year olds. I decided I wanted to get certified as an art teacher. Honey, there's room for change- for some. And I would walk through West Philly & these spots of gentrification. Today there were new immigrants. They pulled a wagon, found the rich, and gave birth to overpopulated, cost-aided, poor communities. So I thought- all work within disenfranchised neighborhoods and support people's needs. Or atleast- letting someone as strong as I am. All understand why someone is trying so hard to stay awake, all understand why some kids don't have the motivation to fit the mold of "model" students for a system that has so much shit to work on. "shit" to work on- that's something we all have. Us- as people who are socialized a certain way. And others- who internalized our inner prejudices into our culture. Some put themselves on the back for desegregating schools- they were a struggle won + praised by the people, not the dominant culture. Because as our towns really desegregated? I learned about racial tension at school. I learned white girls were competitive, latina's were like best, and us cubans- we were just fucking loud. And in the end, we sat with our group at lunch- we were all really dukes and fags. I learned these ideas were untrue- I learned this after I left school. But look at us now- we're grown a lot and one we found to abandon what the system holds for a future of young people? As if. This lead me to seek actual employment. The activism life was fun while it lasted.

elegance, a rugged set of teeth, and his name were hardly intact. Claude talked about the pre-FTAA reign of a police force detaining people who bared any leftist significance, and he talked about the one punk show he attended that week.

"I went to a show, it was so weird, it was right in the middle of the fucking ghetto."

"Oh yeah?" I continued.

"Yeah, there was a crazy dude hanging out with punks in the parking lot. It was totally weird." He seemed appalled, while I seemed annoyed.

"What makes you think they're crazy?" I asked.

"I don't know, dude. I don't know about going to punk shows with people who aren't punks."

"I liked it there. I remember one man who would come to show and draw our picture between bands' sets. The place had been there for years. There wasn't punk show next door but sometimes crowds intermingled. I thought punk rock could be so inclusive. The idea of subcultural and cultural groups with similar social intentions binding is a positive thing, don't you think?"

"I guess."

"Punk rock can be alienating- but at the moment it hasn't been, I was glad everyone in the crowd wasn't a white male in ratty sneakers."

I continued with my nostalgic rhetoric and would occasionally patronize him. Because ignorance was the last tool he needed to accent his radical agenda.

Claude shrugged again. And I hope he remembered these stories through his travels.

Sometimes our stomachs became sore with knots- sometimes we just don't want to admit to the faults of our upbringing. The "don't know, don't go" dichotomy was, in fact, pointless to punk rock- and educating one another about bettering their vision was the step forward we entangled with hope. So, I was glad he was honest on that October. And maybe he could tell his friends about the next new thing called respect.

I told him that next time he is in town, maybe he should visit the Zion bakery several streets down. And it was a long road to follow towards dispelling any ignorance- but here we were, despite how many stone walls clouded our journey. I could restore my simple life of being easily amused and altering my childhood underwear- but I choose to grow. We can delve into this growth and change the faults with our surroundings- it would make us feel a lot better about being us. And maybe next time Claude could have a more open mind- and in sure less interseptions would be blocked by the risk of becoming a detainee.

We would talk for hours and conclude in a similar context- we all have battles engulfing us on a daily level. For some- no matter what they do, they are always queer. For some, no matter what they do, they are always disabled. For some, no matter what they do, they are always a woman. For some, no matter what they do, they are always poor. For some, no matter what they do, they are never white. We want a culture where support is submitted towards our differences- not a culture where assimilation is the only facet allowing us to understand each other.

For myself, I was socialized in a city where workers were required to know Spanish in order to cater to our community, and punk rock was just another subculture comprised of people of varying ethnicities who liked the same songs, shoes, slang, and ideas. Then I turned seventeen and I placed my heritage beyond the context of the Miami vortex.

On some days, I found myself baring the privilege of an English vocabulary and lighter colored flesh. On some days, I was tokenized as a foreign demographic so a sct I was a part of would come off as "diverse." But does this justify my existence as a person of color who isn't overtly oppressed? Not when the informal and formal harassment totally played the race card- by a stranger, in the context of discomfort, and by a supposed ally in the context of a "safe" space. It was then that I realized what that woman told me that one time.

You can't claim revolution without supporting the needs of a marginalized group. What she told me was that revolution without inclusiveness was, in fact, regression.

The seasons were moving forward and I saw leaves change color for the first time. Autumn was a lot like what I searched for.

"It's the change that entwined the embrace of difference in color and essence." I thought to myself. "And that was my revolution."

We spent most of the fall organizing resistance and following those discussions about how simple it became to be detained in most regions of Miami. That week, we demonstrated against the FLA and several hours had passed from the afternoon's permitted marching.

Inside the Mediterranean restaurant, where the air wouldn't damage our lungs, we were waiting for our orders. There were waitresses and business owners catering to our despair, while supporting our dissent. About seventeen of us from different parts of Florida ordered food and drinks. We sat down in a circle while the delegates exited the hotel lobby a few blocks down. Earlier than expected, the riots began on that Thursday.

A friend of mine was shot with a rubber bullet on the knees and sent to the emergency room. A friend of mine was gagged, tear gassed, and sent to prison - she had just turned eighteen. A friend of mine stood there with a blank stare and was threatened with a beating. I walked closer to the intersection, and the dynamic between demonstrators and police was atrocious. I was verbally attacked so I moved towards the restaurant and stood next to a friend of mine named Graham. We talked about the depletion of my hometown and how we didn't think it would go out this way - at least so early in the evening. It was maybe four thirty.

I felt a tap on my shoulder - I turned around and he said hello. I couldn't believe, or withstand, that it was Jimmy Put-while my every fiber wished it weren't. Not now - not at an hour like this. Actually, not at any hour. Before turning to Graham and venting the obvious - I only wanted to vomit the life out of me - but I refrained from any regurgitating action in attempt to be civil. But only because I knew inside that the cook at the restaurant worked awful hard on the falafel pita I had just shoved down my throat.

"How have you been?"

"I don't really want to talk to you right now." I responded and turned away. He attempted to take my arm and ask me what was wrong. We used to be friends, but not any longer. And in all honesty, I hated him.

"Damn, that was so awkward," he concluded, but kept staring.

I wondered why he didn't have the common decency to give me my space, whereas I'm sure he is aware why I hurried the bridges between us. I hated that I never directly confronted him - I invalidated myself. I wondered why he forgot how through the early stages of our friendship, he would coercively force being naked and physical with me. I wondered why he didn't have the common decency to recollect visuals of the situation where he tried to fuck me in my sleep on that one night two years back. I wondered why he didn't realize that I bared inhibition to every one of his friends while I tried to adore them on that one new years eve. I wondered why he didn't get a clue that I intentionally stopped calling in order to instigate self-healing. But I wished he only knew how much it fucking hurt to consistently fall into submission.

I didn't talk about race until I realized I was oppressed one day. I was in my teens.

"Feminism?" the older Cuban woman told me. "That was a white women's movement."

"Feminism - a movement to end sexism. An African-american author said this." I told her in reference to a Bell Hooks book.

"When I think of feminism I think of white liberals slandering the Catholicism embedded in Latino traditions. When I think of feminism, I think of being asked to seek independence when the yearn to raise a family was bound to my culture - was this not independence? When I think of feminism, I think of Cubans laboring for their lives as people - our struggle was about the survival of a society, not gender equity. When I came to America, the second wave of feminism didn't embrace me." She said in Spanish. "I saw working as a method of stamina - not equality. We all worked, cleaned the house, and raised the children."

"Can't you see we're still oppressed - as women?" I thought, as a teenager. However, I wanted to understand.

"One day - when I asked how I could support the feminist movement, a woman told me to vote for a candidate who supported the liberation of women. I told her I couldn't vote - I wasn't a citizen." She concluded.

From then on I learned this. We can't submit to change without learning about our vulnerability - our history.

"I know what you mean though." She continued. "You were born into this feminism - you just called it survival then. You, and the women who raised you."

It was October - I was excited about seeing autumn for the first time and talking about things like masturbation, apple picking, and race. Every morning, a friend from Louisiana would call me - we would talk about gossip and education.

"I'm organizing a conference about people of color with a few other people."

"I'm so there," I said. And by this I meant me and others. We, I would be there - Others, I would work on. I'll emphasize, that like the sentiment of that Cuban woman's words - revolution isn't segregated. Revolution isn't for white only. And how can revolution be inclusive? I want to witness my white friends talk about race - not as if they understand racial oppression, but as if they deem the truth of their privilege and the need to support others. Not as if that ARA patch was enough, but as if learning about where a person of color stood in revolution was a start.

In Pennsylvania, I regained that optimism that was buried beneath last year's songs and memories. And every night that held me closer to the sense in living here - we would always end up at the same restaurant sharing jokes about both sex, making one another eat until-puke, and recollecting the feelings that often allow us to remember how great it was to be alive. And we had to live every day like the last - even though it really only was a restaurant.



At this moment, I punished myself for refraining from attacking in return on that one night in July when he saw my unconscious body as an advantage to his sickening fantasies. And most of the time, I hated that my healing dealt with precise detachment - I never really called him out on his shit to his face. I still have nightmares about it, and I still have daydreams where I'm in a band and he's in the crowd and I sing my jam about sexual assault and beating perpetrators. Shining moments lay to rest in my head - at this moment I felt the disempowerment I felt when I was honest with myself and realized why I was a wreck for two seasons straight. At this moment I struggled to banish all self-invalidation and not hold back at screaming and throwing irrational fits.

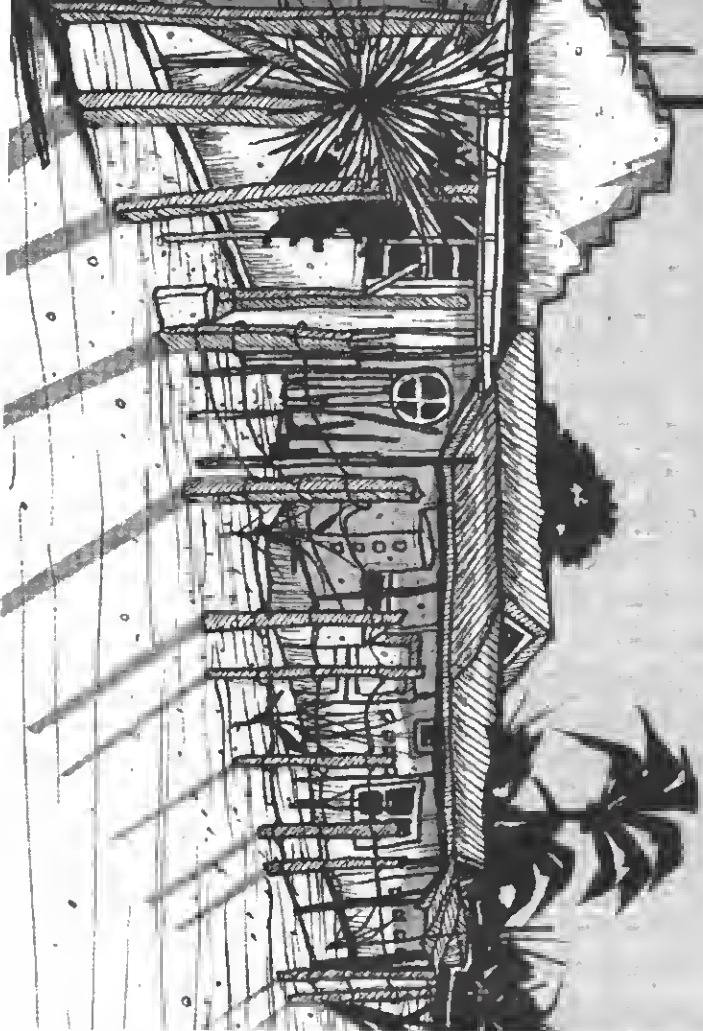
A string of police in riot gear rushed the small assemblage on front of the mediterranean restaurant and demanded that we huddle behind closed doors. I couldn't stop crying and I couldn't stop peering through the corner of my eye in rage and disgust. Timmy stood outside with a handheld video camera, and I sat inside with vengeance toppling over me. I felt held back by trepidation and tears - but this is who I am. This is the point I am at, and I'm not going to soothe myself for how far I haven't come.

Through the process of healing from abuse, more survivors invalidate themselves, rather than single-handedly believe that the assaulters' actions were unquestionably criminal. The surface of a rapist often commits to the form of a nice, caring individual. This is our consistent mind-fuck. I'm a woman, and women are taught vulnerability. Women are taught compassion and compromise. And for almost a year I told myself that I was overreacting. And I remember the January where I reprimanded every moment I ever spent beside him. My anger was not irrational, and my anger was as valid as my emotional breakdown. That Thursday at the restaurant, my friend held me. A friend of mine, Sasha, again played my heroine and went outside and demanded Timmy to refrain from interacting with me.

Today I had my home town embedded with tear gas and hundreds of my allies imprisoned. Today I had twenty of my closest friends holding me and understanding the validity of my reaction. Today I collected myself. And to myself, I said that the next time there wouldn't be police threats and high tension consuming what was left of my self-confidence. Next time, I see verbal attacks towards the man who made me question my judgement on assault and my sexual boundaries for a year.

Sasha walked back into the restaurant and told me his response was a no, almost uneasy, while saying he would respect my space. I smiled at her and said that next time would be different. I'd save the tears, rise up and it would ultimately be the last. We're often told to believe that our anger was violent - almost irrational and oppressive. But honey, it's just not like that. She said she would be an ally in calling him out on his shit. But more importantly, she said, today it was perfectly fine to cry.

This was my Revolution



Eventually I went back home. I recollected myself- my changes, our changes. We all dressed alike, but at the same time we wanted to kill each other. And I wasn't much of a violent person, but the tension wasn't good for manic depression. I thrived on inspiration, but often times, it's hard to come by when we nitpick at one another's imperfections. We- a knitted scene where many of us haven't even put a face to a name we've heard embedded beneath shit-talk. And what I needed was the opposite of this. That August, I lost it. How do you lose it in five easy steps?

You put your ear against the wall to hear the good-humored voices and sewing machines, wishing you could be there. You listen to songs that are reminiscent of past lovers who you only wish to beat the shit out of right now. You tell yourself your style is busted. You condemn your style- it's on your body. You avoid constructive talks that could possibly lead to redemption, take the first bus to New York- get drunk, vomit. Mistakenly eat meat- vomit pork on your new dress.

What I had asked from summer was the ability to learn in a constructive context. How can I have that in a whirlwind of petty hurt? I learned that were human, radical or not. And we can't live to be objective entities. Were fragile bones, not a demographic. Sometimes we cry, sometimes tranquility ruptures- and sometimes I can't be the pro-active support heroin others expect from me. And sometimes, our weaknesses give us character.

A few weeks into September, Pony and I saw paintings, snuck into Gardene, and had pigeon shit swathe our backs. We laughed and dodged mosquitoes by way of dancing in public fountain. It was a nice day, that Saturday.

Walking home, we talked about inspiration and how it comes with inner peace- being a recluse as a defense could be redeeming to social anxiety. But then again, we would miss each other at parties- how we'd get in frilly panties, make out with sandwiches, wear homemade bear costumes, and sing early nineties dance music.

We walked further, ran into a friend, and I welcomed an affirmative rage. The sound my feet made as they stepped on the concrete inspired me. It reminded me of dubbing audio into short films, and short films usually inspired me. We talked about the to-do list we wrote, how that were happy. Luke, our friend we ran into, smiled and said it's always refreshing to come out of a slump of despair- you always want to write lists of all the things you *can* do now that your body is in control. I smiled- my friends inspired me. They had strong words and great teeth.

I went home- I put my ear against the wall for upbeat vibrations- to hear the songs that were playing in the room louder. The songs reminded me of past lovers I couldn't wait to see the following month. And I didn't condemn my body, but stare into the mirror and adore my own teeth. I said to myself that *these* were the five steps I had meant to learn earlier that same year. The ones about salvation.

On one of the last weekends that summer, the republicans assembled in northeast Manhattan. We demonstrated against them and there was about fifteen protesters consoling me.

"History repeats itself doesn't it?" Someone asked me. "I can't tell if you're patronizing me, asshole." I felt a lot more winded this time around-November wasn't repeating itself. The cops were a lot easier to cuss at this year.

I hadn't been arrested, but my favorite songs that season meant these things- manic depression, distant love, hopeless transition, diseases tearing away at my bestfriends, and two hundred and fifty arrests. And maybe it was okay that I broke the mold of the flawed summer. But at this point, I resurrected the moments that enlivened me and held them beside me. There was something delved beneath the stained concrete, the glass towers, and the passerbys in New York City. Through the course of three weeks it slowly became a second home. And behind east village skyscrapers and rooftops swathed in red bricks- the sunset was never the same shade of orange.

I went from crying to laughing with every step on the march across the Brooklyn bridge. And maybe I *would* submit to the hopes and dreams I harvested as an eight year old. I always looked at pictures of New York City back then. And right now, she heartened me. Within city limits, a slew of rambunctious queer girls demanded I spend every night with them and the songs of bohemian Broadway musicals rang in the back of my head. The trains ran all night and I seem to pee a lot more than usual in New York. I'm usually chronically dehydrated, but I know it was the water.

"I found a new form of therapy." I told them.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah- gay bars in the lower east side. But I guess I should still see a therapist?"

"It's a living."

They said I was stubborn for not seeing a doctor. I said I was ecstatic that night, so why bother. Five of us ended up in a cold warehouse shower singing our favorite songs and thinking this is the redemption we often lived for. Tom almost fell off the tub's veranda, Hayley and I juxtaposed to songs she recorded when she was thirteen, Ryan blocked the cold water from our trembling bodies, and John insisted on bringing more pizza in. And this wasn't how I objected the republicans that August- this wasn't revolution. But sometimes we stress ourselves- sometimes we forget that this is fine- sometimes we forget that *this* is some definition of livelihood.

I gave myself deadlines for when I should be okay- emotionally, tactfully. But the daydreams that graced my imagination often intermingled and contradicted. I was wrong to be so hard on myself, as we all often are.

"This wasn't normal." I would say to myself

But then again, what *was* normal? Mistakes, depression, open wounds- rupture. And normalcy was a word to describe our lifeblood. Normalcy was commotion and thinking too hard, outdoing yourself and giving up, rearranging and ineptness, tears and elation. And I couldn't say my realization explained anything my body did to me- but I could say that it felt human to be in love with *something* again.

The protests were over- but in the fringe of our active minds, we could still hear helicopters in the far distance. That night three of the boys were finding internet boyfriends and drinking pints of Yuengling, while Kate, JD, and I sat in a circle on the bed. We talked about how effective our actions were. We talked about the taboo aspects of the FTAA protest last November- of its success and lack thereof. The meetings weren't shut down and I saw an inescapable amount of arrests.

Although, our hope remained intact. While more than five thousand people of varying social landscapes mobilized to counteract free trade, Root Cause initiated the first grass roots mobilization where people of varying cultural backgrounds marched in solidarity, and together- both permitted and non-permitted demonstration withstood the most overwhelming authoritarian force many had ever seen. My home was transformed into a police state. And despite this, seeing an integration of resistance was new and often beautiful to me. My story was more about barriers and tension- every group for themselves in an often valid defense.

In Miami, I grew up between Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Nicaraguan neighbors. We shared our unique version of cooking ingredients, and we shared our unique version of a mop which involved off-white pipes and a rag with a hole punched through it which passed through the shaft. Dubbed, el Palo de Trapiar and translated as "the stick of ragging"- it was only a materialized token of what we shared. For a long time, I felt this was how the city was constructed- ideal and heaving with babies of mixed Latino blood. When I began discovering truths through my own experience, I realized that for a long time I was wrong. The segregation due to cultural boundaries, reactionary upper class groups of similar heritage, and endless years of gentrification burned the bridges between exiles, families, and missionaries that encompassed my city.

Im Cuban- I grew up knowing my culture was segregated within itself.

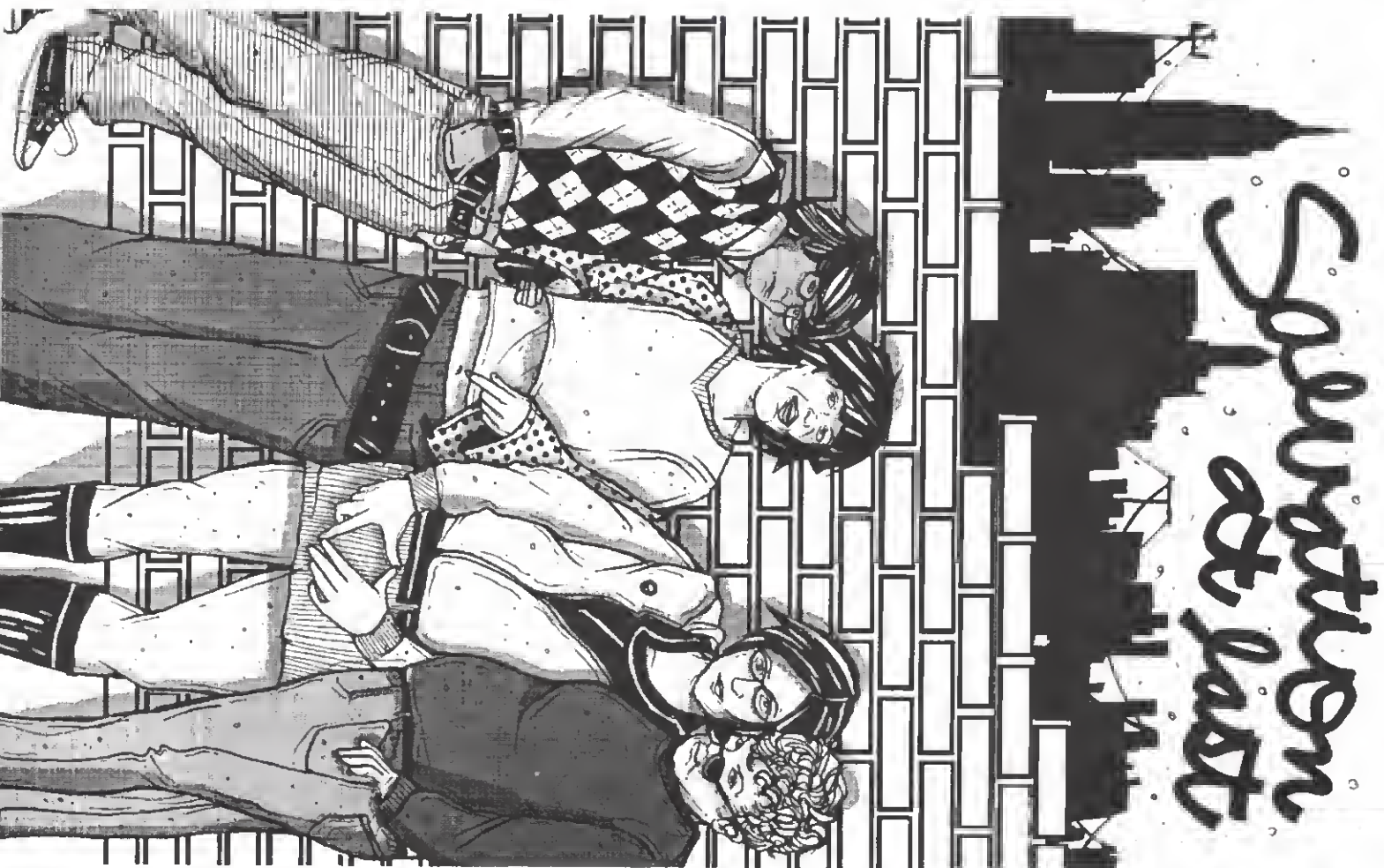
This is what I've worked from.

There was Castro enthusiasts, the Castro resistance of the reactionary right, and the few and far between leftist Castro resistance. In Cuba, they were the women, the queers, and the proletariat who often identified themselves as El Movimiento Libertario Cubano, but ultimately Cuban anarchists. This was where I stood- I

could hardly befriend a Cuban republican, and at the same time I stalwartly dissented over thirty years of the subjugation towards the Cuban People. Among these people were those in over a hundred and forty-four prisons, those effected by Castro's reestablishment of the death penalty, countless anarcho-syndicalists, a throng of innocent homosexuals, quarantine AIDS patients, and the remainders of my family working right outside of Havana who experienced a life where it was unconstitutional to leave home- in spite of subjugation or in will of education. Among the suffering due to Castro's regime were also countless civilians in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, and Argentina after his support of both urban and rural guerilla movements. And as the movements engaged the US determination to keep control of the countries in its sphere of influence- guerilla tactics often involved rape, robbery, kidnapping, torture, and murder of untold civilians.

In deep-seated focus, I read Jose Marti poetry and unlearned the mind-fucking from both sides. I saw members of my mothers generation rise financially and fit the capitalistic mold which granted them supreme stature in Miami's social ladder. At the same time, I saw the basis of the United States relations towards Cuba in the late sixties until the late seventies allow the coast guard to welcome Cubans as allies and deny the arrival of countless Haitian refugees. At the same time, I saw the Cuban Government embrace United States political prisoners in exile and dissent all accounts of free trade, in spite of capitalism while the Cuban people's suffering is severely disregarded. At the same time, political prisoners freed in Cuba through the 1970s came overwhelmingly from working class and campesino backgrounds. This release still welcomed a fresh bouquet of proletarian political prisoners. And in 1999, the US came to terms that no, the embargo wasn't enough to plague disadvantage, and it was about time Cuban refugees were denied alongside to Haitian neighbors. And I often wondered why some radicals never realized that Cuba had a face that persecuted their proletariat. There was more than the face of education, literacy, and healthcare- and three improvements didn't constitute justice.

Taking sides was trivial- I chose to take none. I wasn't about to educate myself on a resistance based on capitalist integrity, and I wasn't about to fool myself into embracing a "collective dictatorship". A dictatorship of the people is a contradiction in itself, seeing that power is placed anywhere but the hands of the proletariat.



With that experience, I developed a third focus.

That summer that I had moved to Philadelphia, three of us facilitated a workshop towards combating sexual assault, open to people in and outside of the activist community. I learned working with others who are putting effort towards consoling rape survivors was my inevitable purpose.

As my friends' self-healing progressed we went beyond our local situation itself. We wanted to educate each other about rape- what we define as our boundaries, what to define as sexual assault, what to define as an abusive relationship, and what myths we yearned to demystify. Sexual abuse is sickeningly normalized within the culture we live in. That in itself is manipulated and rape is justified as okay violence- as oppose to a hate crime.

We don't fucking ask for it- its not the way we dress that normalizes it, honey. What normalizes it is the socially ingrained practice of domination that consistently breathes life into almost every human dynamic.

I've had to witness artists and films romanticize and satirize rape and assault as just another fact of our culture that is tangible to their own discretion. Ive seen people applaud at the domination of another person's body. And the truth is that violation is violation, despite the context. The concept of violation is ceaselessly triggering- no matter how desensitized our rape culture is. Deconstructing these norms was an initial step towards that justice we yearn for daily.

We knew we had a lot of work to do- to raise the consciousness towards violation in an activist community, in a local community, in a work or school community, and in a cultural and sub-cultural community. Rape is too often dismissed when the perpetrator or their allies are on the upper end of any power dynamic, and this in itself dismisses one to many survivors who never even received validation.

We wont listen to your inadvertently rape-defensive punk rock bands. We wont obey your rape-defensive rules, despite the social dynamic between us. We don't care if you're our legal guardians, our bosses, or our formative heroes. We wont compromise with your rape-defensive critiques. And to many, we might be "fucking bitches". We might be "fucking cunts". To many- assertive dissent is shocking, irresponsible, and lacking any self-control. But this is what we had to do to unlearn the notion that we will *always* remain victimized.

I heard the critique reiterated- where the "crazy feminists" beat up the rapist when he imposed his presence at the intended safe space. "This isn't safety- this isn't constructive"- is what witnesses would often say. But honey, maybe we were "crazy feminists"- but we weren't irrational or irresponsible. However, we were impulsive- and it was fucking righteous. We weren't accustomed to repressive, violent tactics- we were taught to compromise, and it was about time our defenses allow us to unlearn that. And these actions based on anger that the "crazy feminists" performed were absolutely okay- absolutely empowering.

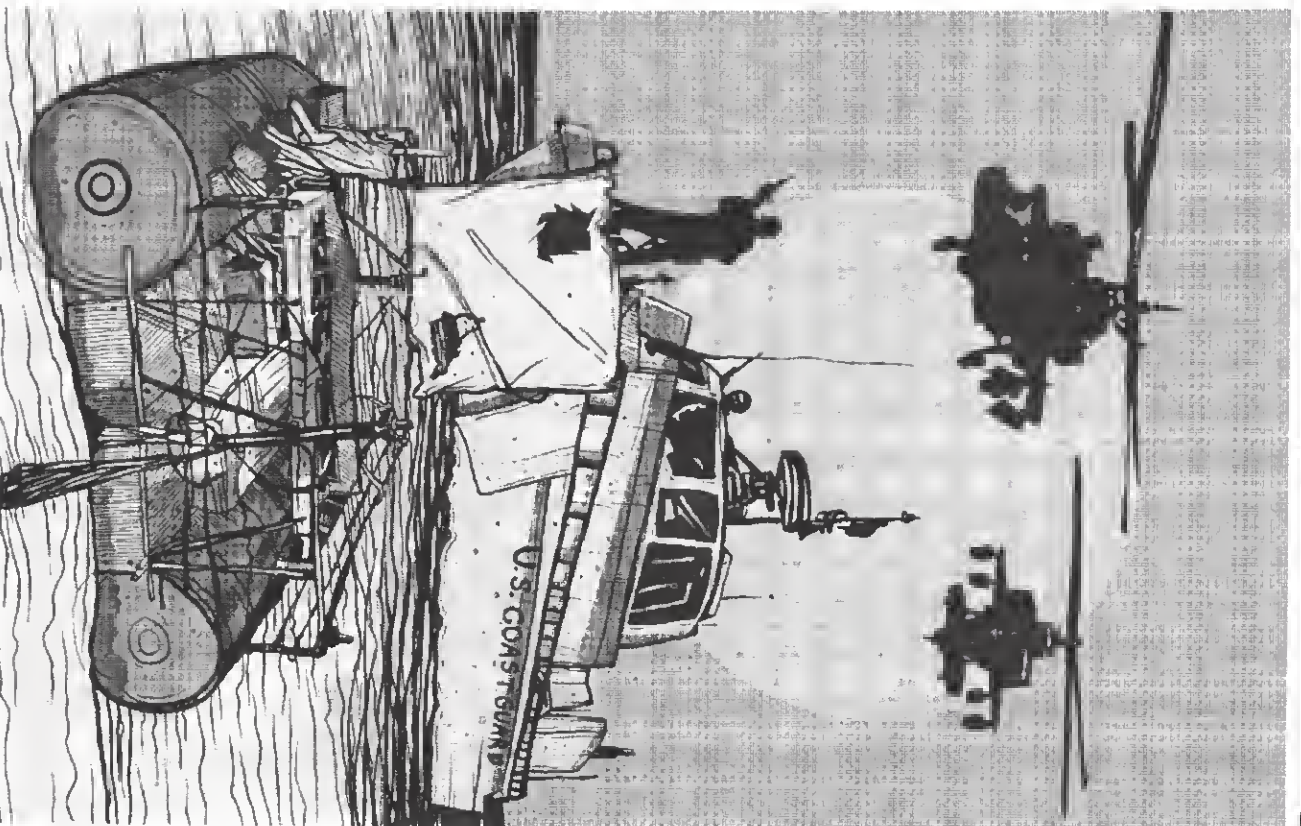
Our city of Philadelphia was over one hundred and thirty square miles- one in every ten passerby belonged to a distinct community. Working to revitalize the rape culture in our city alone is a lifelong challenge. But only for now, as we supported one another and could see that bout of self-healing in one another's eyes, we could say that we had something going in the space we created. And to us, this *was* a move towards justice.

Someone once asked me if my family left Cuba out of its economy allowing them to lose land. I had to spitefully respond with the truth that, honey, my family had never owned land and we still don't.

And when Miami's Cuban-dominant reactionary right talks about firms, private islands, and contracts to dismiss a working class family of their incentive- my family was there to counteract. I was asked twice if my family was a fraction of the Cuban wing of exiles who bared association to the CIA. And amidst combustion and holding back the fists and projectile vomit- traces of the truth would race through my mind. The traces were like slits through the most tender parts of my skin. And the truth is that a family linked to the CIA would have never had to stash three to a bed in a one-bedroom house upon their arrival to the states.

It was Castro's tyrannical decision to engage in free-range shooting against civilian insurgents who's blood nestles in my own skin. And the next time a member of the radical left assures me that Castro's Cuba is a fine anti-capitalist retreat with adequate healthcare and supreme educational facilities- I would have to remind them that this wasn't how it felt when those relatives I never knew were executed on a fine line which divided a wealthy dictator from a poor civilian. And like many impoverished islands- Cuba, I assure them, does remain as a fine retreat. Always towards high profile tourism- yet never civil righteousness.

While I reminisced of what I had taught and what I had learned- I remembered the rallying and smiled. It was my decision to focus on the integration of all people who graced my hometown of Miami. I would swerve stealthily into what I had learned as a nine year old about Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Cubans marching towards a common stint of hope. And *this* was my revolution. When I sat on the sideline and watched Root Cause march on that Thursday in November, I saw that floor plan beneath thousands of workers' soles. The one that would reconstruct all those bridges we once watched collapse.



Political asylum? Not in South Florida.

questions we constantly asked ourselves about violation. Why a person who I invested so much of *myself* in? Why are *my* friends hurting? Why does this have to happen to *anyone*? Why are people choosing sides? It wasn't about sides. It was about an ultimate action- supporting that group of people who had violation in common. Scoffing at my vulnerability went out with my seventeenth birthday- we were capable of doing this in emotional shambles.

Sexual abuse became a weapon against cohesion. Being a deep-seated ally doesn't have to consume us in a draining way. It should allow us to let out every ounce of emotion thriving to escape our bodies- we can feel hurt and disappointment. And as much as we called our tactics failures- hurt didn't make us any less of a "feminist".

Never were we failures- and I tried to tell myself that every nervous breakdown only made us stronger.

As an ally- we can console the survivor and it didn't have to be with a together face. We want to submit to the demands of the survivor and share those discussions that enable us to support each other. We won't discuss the assault on a public forum without their consent. We'll never name names without discretion. We'll actively make the effort to hold the perpetrator accountable in the community they've involved themselves in, and outside communities as well. We'll actively educate one another about healing methods and the myths that often let us invalidate ourselves. We'll take these steps alongside to the survivors. As an ally, we'll promise not to move too fast and consistently take the callous reality of trauma into account.

We would talk over letters and support groups. Everything that had happened in the last year had reached a community level- how can we be constructive, supportive, and at the same time be truthful to ourselves? The person we dealt with was a serial sexual assaulter. We needed to go beyond giving him a list that gave him the option of complying from the first to the last step and later making him feel like he was finally an okay male. He often discussed his psychoanalysis with us- he tried to justify *why* he did these things. He often mind-fucked other women and searched for his own healing. He was fucking good at manipulation, I know, I had been there. And with this truth, it became a clique in defense of assault. Not acting in harmony, but towards his control.

This wasn't "working on your shit"- and truthfully, supporting a perpetrator never involve the justification of their actions. We all have pasts that trigger our oppressive present actions. So, I knew of his pasts and I hated them- when I called him a friend, I could only bare to sympathize with anything that damaged him. But things often change- I was no longer the person who wrote him "I love you but I can't understand you". I was no longer the person who consoled to his feelings of alienation. I hated him and his pleas of neediness constituting assault- and this was me now. What we want to do is work on those present day actions, more so than spend months explaining them.

This wasn't what we needed to hear. We wanted to hear Damon hold himself accountable, we wanted to hear his apologetic sentiment, we wanted him to respect our actions by making his role as an assaulter visible, we want him to consciously eliminate his presence at any space that was intended to create safety towards all people. This isn't to say that ostracizing is the ideal method towards combating violation in a community- this is to say that it's perfectly fine sometimes. And that was the last I heard of compromise.

Containing a perpetrator in the space we choose and asking their allies to quit invalidating the survivors was relentlessly difficult. Its often true that a rapist would fail to hold themselves accountable. Although, its also often true that many survivors of any form of sexual abuse don't have that community to back them up.

The Death of Silence

So, I lived here now. But my first visit to Philadelphia was like therapy—ive come a long way. Then, it was my private method of healing from sexual abuse. Since then, it's been about two years and I decided that I wanted to be a consistent support to survivors of abuse and violation—through the phases they call themselves victimized, until the point where they can stand behind the title of "survivor". From the point where language is weakened and words like assault and violation are consistently thrown around, to the point where we can define our abuse as valid. Every form of violation is menacing.

I remember last winter I talked a lot about developing a focus—a stance I want to take towards one thing. At the time I was thinking a lot about farm workers and big business's justification of modern day slavery. I wanted to work against that, for ours. Then came that January, where I found out an old friend of mine had come out as a serial sexual assaulter. His name was Damon and he was originally from Pennsylvania—since this, eight of our friends could say they had violation in common.

That winter I came to terms with the truth that no, we don't have one focus. There isn't really a battle over who is more oppressed—what needs more attention, what is invalid activism. Spurts of subjugation rise, fall, and intermingle. Each person fights an individual battle, whereas we all intersect within a crisis of triumph and defeat. And we can't condemn each other for choosing to work with one battle instead of another—often times we work with what hits closest to home.

Home is interchangeable—violation made it home again.

I wanted to be strictly hard and strictly pro-active when working against sexual assault in the Philadelphia community. I didn't want to be a frail ally. I didn't want to misuse the word ally, and justify my support by means of mere things like titles and internal sympathy. I wanted to get over my petty tears and any traces of disillusionment—does it really matter that the perpetrator was an integral part of my life? Does it really matter that the perpetrator was one of the five friends I trusted when I dealt with my self-healing after I was assaulted? I thought, no, not if I want to be the fiercest enigma I constantly draw pictures of on the blank margins of every page of my notebook.

Damon's actions were always on the back of my mind when I first moved into the house I lived at. And with every reminder of who I was two summers ago—I realized my body went beyond muscles and constructivism. I had weaknesses—and they were okay to bare daily. I couldn't live my life arranging mediated discussions and pretending my bones weren't as fragile as they truly were. And for a minute it felt as if the survivors were supporting me. Why me? Damon never raped me. But on that night, all I could do was cry and dig my head in the corner where my mattress and the bedroom wall met. It wasn't out of nostalgia and how much things had really changed, but over the inevitable

Life Story

It was almost eighty degrees, but finally winter in Florida. For most of us, it was our last year here. Although I was living in Sarasota, I frequented Miami on moments besides large protests. I initially had moved out a day before my eighteenth birthday on one of my worst summers to date. Running from conflict, joking about my vulnerability, and consuming large jars of peanut butter was my closet anecdote. I didn't share this with friends until I realized how terrible my rendition of therapy really was. Since then, my mother's been re-married, my sister and I have gotten scholarships and financial grants, I attended college, and that winter was my last year. Albeit, my family managed to maintain the house roster that I grew up with. Every member of my family who made it to the states alive resided in the same block in a newer developed suburb in southwest Miami. Although substantially nothing like the districts I grew up in, they've managed to find a house large enough and affordable enough for three generations of women, and my stepfather's family.

I was visiting for the winter. My family often made comments about how bizarre it was to see the tourist-laden strip of Biscayne boulevard, blurred with police lines the last November. I spent parts of my childhood there.

When I was eight or nine, we used to pave the intersection of Biscayne and Flagler. We would often smile, but it took me seven years to realize that in those instances, my smile denoted yearning. On some Sundays, I would pretend to be wealthy. I would walk and peer at alienating lifestyles. As a child, I wouldn't very often see the tallest buildings in Miami. I had lived in ten different neighborhoods, mostly between Hialeah and Westchester which were spread through the western suburbs of Miami. In most of my neighborhoods, class wasn't structurally declared. On the same street as one of the houses I lived in, was a tiny cube-shaped house and another which belonged to a congresswoman. The congresswoman was one or three blocks down, whereas the cube was across the wayside. The residents of the cube house would frequent my birthday parties, which often emulated block parties. I didn't have very many friends my age, but a community of families who had four distinct Latino heritages. Across six foot long wooden tables, we would strategically place paella, tamales, flan de leche, and a meringue cake. All living under the same roof, my grandmother, mother and aunt would cook these themselves the night before.

On the Sundays where we went downtown, I would view

On those sundaye we would return home and the lights of the house were often dim. It was the only night of the week where a family dinner was attainable. My sister and I shared a bedroom and my half was intentionally dismantled. On some sundays, my sister wanted to be rich, my mother had trouble believing that I was actually ecstatic to be alive, and I wanted badly to be a boy. Then the following monday, I would attend my fourth grade class and my mom would come home at a quarter to ten. We wouldn't have dinner by the glitz and charm of the east side of downtown, but several minutes would pass and I would feel fine about being girl, my mom would reach assurance that she was raising a healthy devoted family, and my sister found eolace in what we had.

Right now, the Miami skyline has more than one meaning to me. I think of being fifteen and the image in my head is of black and white photographs depicting strength after subjugation. I think of being seventeen and see the alleyways I would often retreat to so I can make out with my friends because gay sex and loud music was restricted in a room I shared with my sister. I think of twenty one and that november where my hometown was delved in ashes of resistance, tear gas, authoritarian brutality, and every intersection blocked by a line of riot police.

Now, it was December and I realized that november, 1991, and my oblivion to class structure were over. That year was almost over and I had learned a lot about stability. On some mornings in the spring I would awake three or four states away from Miami. On several mornings that summer I woke up in south Philadelphia and referred to a house on Morris and fifteenth as home. That august I was on a rooftop on twenty first and shattuck in Berkeley, Ca. With every east bay sunrise and every morning where our sheets were damp in sweat and rain water- we would talk about home a lot.

I went back to sarasota that fall. This year I had realized that my town may never amount to the culture Miami

I live in Pennsylvania now. So much has changed—except us. And I can't say we had friends for this long, but we always been convinced we were more than just everlasting inside jokes. I'm sitting in front of a woman who is laughing hysterically, shoving french fries into the mouth of some kid. As much as it makes me laugh, I can't help but stare awkwardly and think of you— and how if you were here you would let me shove food into your mouth in an attempt to mock them. Then we'd make fun of the president you numb my brain. Its fucking sick. But I guess I'm happy to feel this way again.

Veristyr

Things to do before



RETURN TO SENDER

we spent time organizing the
inside friend
A rub a rub and

Then there was this one night, I think it was around July 10th. Friends were visiting from bloomington, paris, dc, and providence. In the morning I bought bread at the corner store and miserably failed at altering the crotch of five pairs of men's pants. I had found them within debris of abandoned ideas paralyzing black notebooks, broken plastic sex toys, and spray painted dress shoes in a corner of my bedroom. My bedroom had concrete walls and a wooden floor where you could feel heat radiating from the light fixtures of the first floor ceiling. The cracks let light shone through in a charming, yet ragged way. That morning I woke up on lacy's bed, like I often did. I would mostly wake up there because my fear of the dark would strike me haplessly- it sometimes reminded me of my dad who I never really knew or being sexually assaulted at a house I deemed as safe. That morning it was neither- it just felt good to make out with your best friend before falling asleep sometimes. And it wasn't always fear, but positivity struck me too.

It had been a difficult week for a lot of us- My friend who flew in from paris, my housemates who were on the verge of transition, and my relatives who didn't know what they wanted by emotionally stable? You cant.

On that night seven of us drank boxed wine and beer, perched on a wooden rooftop that overlooked west philadelphia. Before morning embraced us, windows surrounded us with open curtains proving that life out there was blossoming ecstatically. Sometimes they were naked, and we smiled dumb- at ease that we weren't the only ones who made the best out of a Saturday evening.

We talked about lost love across the atlantic, growing up, and the ways our outlook often dictates what motions our hands make when we create. We saw a shooting star- some saw it as awe, I saw it as deliverance.

embodied, although the peers I had worked on a foundation of impulse and support. The year was almost over and that December I almost hitchhiked to Mississippi to visit old friends and spend the end of the year in a strange house in eastern Arkansas.

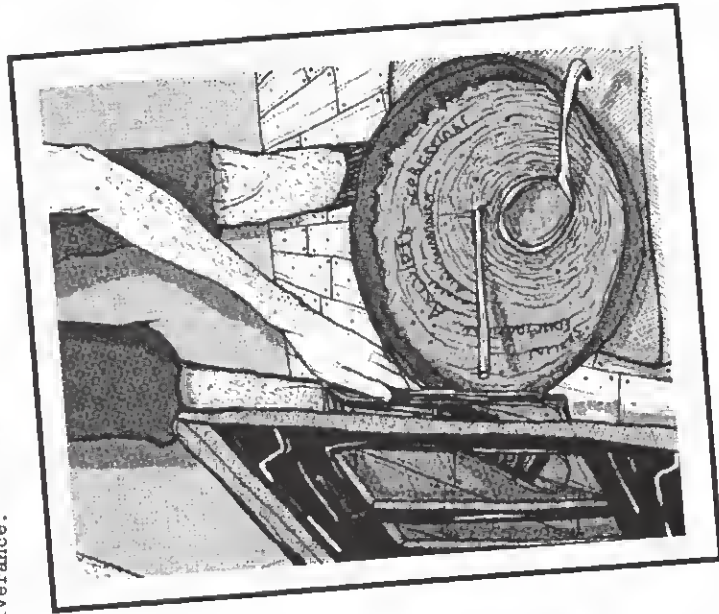
Instead, I chose to stay in Miami.

It was hardly cold and maybe thirty of us saw the fireworks on the beach that night. For the first time Miami was my retreat instead of a breeding ground I often took for granted. We talked about the Haitian independence day parade. We talked about the way my neighbors in South Philly were culturally reminiscent to my neighbors from the bomb shelter houses. We talked about the history of the argentine bakery on 71st and Collins, and we talked about strap-on sex and French feminism.

I was moving to Philadelphia, Sasha was going to Paris, and Ben was going to London. Ben and I had half a year left to be neighbors and Sasha was leaving to Paris in about two or three weeks. We layed in the sand and watched the fireworks for almost a complete hour in an embrace. I looked at the skyline and saw parts of Miami I would have never stepped foot in when I was nine years old. And in the end, beauty laid in the truth in how much things hadn't changed.

Back then, I didn't seem fit into the social structure that was made for those of a rich and reactionary agenda. Now, we still failed to fit- but only youth showed me that starving for wealth and fishing for stature wasn't what made us ecstatic on those Monday nights. It was the dignity that came with how far we had come, and how much it raised our social consciousness. This renaissance enveloped us when realizing how much subjugation we can fight off with determination and not a penny of bail.

Ben kept commenting on how beautiful the fireworks were and the three of us layed in one another's arms smiling without control. I was wearing boots my sister had given me as a gift which right now she could afford on her own salary. The three of us held a home-made aesthetic, damp sand entwined in our fingers and toes, an alliance to the people who incite the city that surrounded us, and hope nestled on the seams of our hearts. Earlier on that november, we had our arms locked tight in demonstration-but at the stroke of midnight we had our arms locked tight for the sake of remaining close. And Miami wasn't chintzy and uncomfortable- this was Miami.



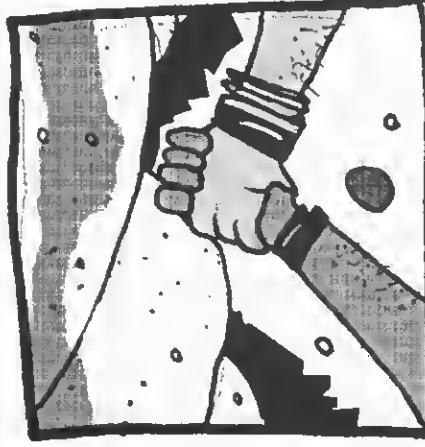
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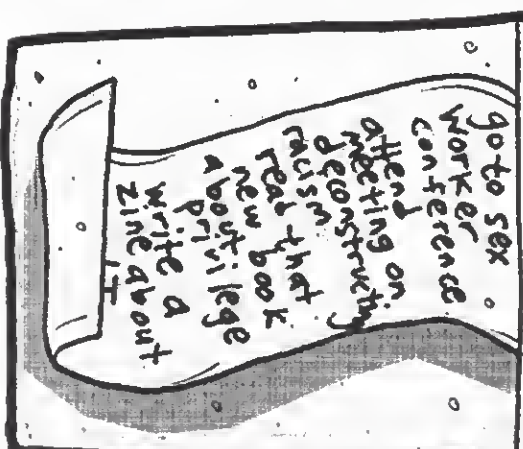
We had, for years, learned about what corporations not to support and what candidates are closer to giving us choice rather than demands. We read tests on radical thought and worked on being conscious. In a way, this still in no way constituted us as a group that had our shit together.



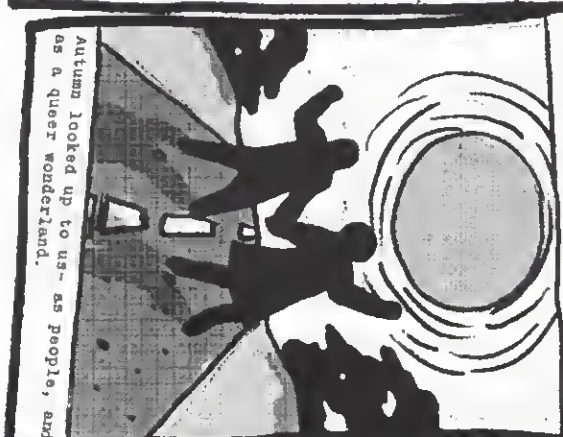
What I looked for now was inner peace and a dialogue that would help us learn from each other- what language would eliminate the repression of a transgender person, what actions would eliminate the self-doubt of a person with mental disabilities, and what considerations I wanted others to take in order to support me as a woman of color.



The list was endless, thus making working on our shit a lifelong process rather than a midnight escape. How we can eliminate our petty inhibitions? Socializing is difficult.

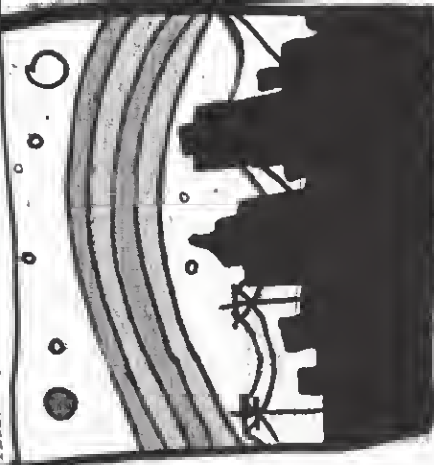


Fucking each other, having a radical book collection, and having popular friends never constituted a revolution.

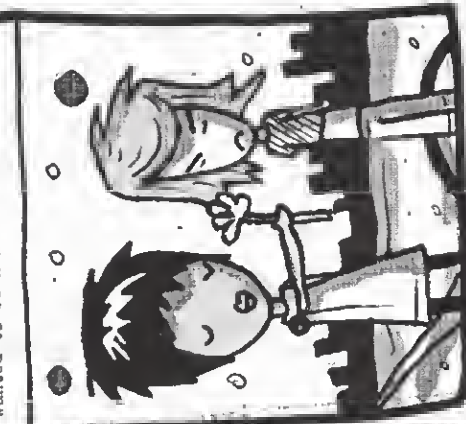


Kissing & Learning

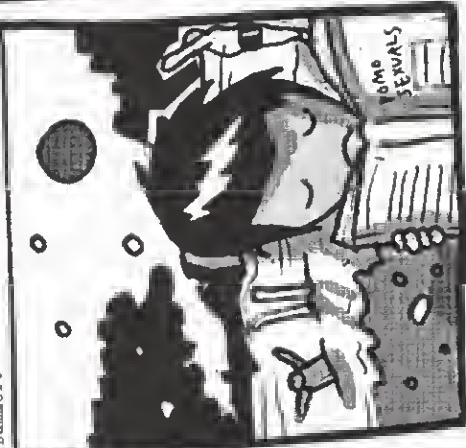
That summer, I thought I went crazy- but I made light of it sometimes. I was walking home from the bookstore one day and the woman next to me called Philadelphia a queer wonderland.



And I smiled at some prospects- the Ethiopian restaurants, the vegan sandwiches, the oil cans, and that one girl- everyone called her a bitch, but I wanted to be her best friend.



And as much idealism there was in the rhetoric of our town, the social structure of the position I was in showed me how eager we were all to learn- this is what I wanted from summer.



hot dates were a reward.



Ben lived a ten minute bike ride from me in Sarasota, where most of my friends lived. We were impulsive together. We would by plane tickets across the country and across the atlantic if we had the money- but mostly because something told us it felt right. We set ourselves up on dates with twelve hour journeys to see our favorite bands, amidst high blood pressure and chronic infections. I always felt the need to leave him love letters with drawings of drug paraphernalia and genitalia on his door. When unfolding our agenda- it often seemed as if things were a mess. But Ben's strengths had always been a sense of humor, a big heart, fucking tight style, and the ability to coordinate our lives single handedly. Nevermind the speed and our idealist plans to take over new york city.

We would question our embraces of a formal education, and plans often concluded in illegal drugs, pretending to be famous, and loving debauchery. Although every weekend reigned extravagance, I remembered the last Valentines Day we spent together. Despite the staple for materializing affection that today was- lately things had both hurt and engaged. Telephone conversations had altered my perception of pasts friends and lovers. On ons of the nights that week, Lacy had called me from Philadelphia to tell me she missed me and to tell me someone I used to love had sexually assaulted a number of my friends.

"Damon's nine times more of the douchebag than we had ever imagined." she told me, almost hesitantly.

"I cant fucking believe this. How many women were they?"

"Seven at the least. We're calling him out as a group tomorrow."

"Bash his face in for me. It'll be a great goodbye." I couldn't sleep for a few nights and I finally, yet involuntarily, learned what people meant by unconditional disillusionment.

There was a party that Valentines Day and in the living room there was people we had never spoken to, health food on the table, and speed sprawled about everyone's nose. I kept facing attitudes that weren't everlasting- but ever-changing, and in the back of my mind was that conversation that I wished were easier to shrug off. Although as it got later, we managed to smile from our own natural will, so I mads Ben breakfast at two AM. Ben was really great at consistently supporting me, by all means possible. So the following morning, nothing was dull and we made weekend plans to drive to Tallahassee and back. These were the shapes therapy came in. These things we did on impulse only made perfect sense.

The top of the car was down, we had a resurgent new appeal to nature, and the pines growing alongside palms were exceptionally radiating. We wore matching outfits and our obligations were afar. I told him that this is what I meant by support and he played my favorite song on the radio.

However, I knew I smelled bad and ben had bloodshot eyes. We both had insomnia, and every car on the road hated us. But it didnt really matter, because at least we had each other.

Subculture Kids

One night, Kate and I were once talking over cookies we had just baked and a bottle of cheap merlot. To Kate and I, teenagers meant social interactions and long talks. Records were sprawled about my bedroom floor, and the perfect accent of chocolate and wine dripped along the left side of our life.

She had grown up in Tallahassee and growing up in a subculture was as different as night and day for each of us. She had negative connotations and accents of struggle: I had love stories about sex and garbage, and narratives feasible for epic punk novels. Until I turned eighteen—my struggles were accented with my life outside of the subculture.

When I interacted with battles facing my family and my fifteen year old heart overflowed with uneasiness—I belted my favorite songs at a show the following weekend and said to myself that everything was going to be alright. An emotionally abusive relationship enabled me to develop body issues, and I dealt with these blindly through snorting white lines that made me skinny. When the coming down periods became relentless—a boy I met through flying for my band helped me overlook substances and I later felt beautiful. At sixteen, punk rock love song mix tapes fueled our long-distance romance. And when a relative preened that a teenager identifying as queer was merely a teenager embracing a phase of rebellion—a mutual love for the same punk rock band united me and my first long-winded crush. She was originally from Richmond, Virginia—and I remember she looked beautiful when she belted the screaming parts of her favorite songs.

My community wasn't ideal. Initially, I saw punk rock as an inadvertent boy's club. Initially, I was intimidated by the clique segregation that bombarded the show of certain local bands. I sometimes felt my route to acceptance came in the form of dating the boy who played guitar for that one band. These nights were meant to be communal—the fucking flyer said so. Eventually, I discovered the bond between queer issues, feminist doctrines, and punk rock. In Miami, I found artists who had these elements sewn to their sleeve. And with that inspiration, I felt punk rock didn't involve acceptance and societal standards—but a boisterous herd of

understand instructions. And your fifth grade teacher—what a jerk! I don't even know how she made it into the school system in Miami!"

We laughed together, but it was only funny while it lasted. Later that month, I became critical about my actions—socially and academically. I wanted my speech to be punctual—my grammar to be pristine. I wanted the thesaurus to taste my languages. I looked back and it was true—I was slow at grasping concepts, but then again, what child isn't immersed in imagination and a boycott of all things formal? What child doesn't want to sit dirt, and learn from playful interactions rather than militant structures? I had never met very many. Albeit, what child is condemned for being spacey and imaginative? More than I could hope for.

My voice was manipulated by speech classes, grammar books, speech therapy, and courses on public speaking. My voice became freed from its roots and the seeds of my accent rusted with the outline of my culture.

"What are you?" Kids at my high school asked then, without disgrace.

"I mean, like, you look like a latina, but you talk like a white girl."

"Haw man, I knew her in 4th grade. She was a Cubanita then. Make her talk in Spanish, it's still totally straight."

"Shit, talk in Spanish, girl." So I didn't know if these people were just jealous that I was fluent in two languages, or if they just didn't realize that this was disrespect. I disregarded it and tolerated it as a fact of life. Then I graduated.

I look back and I hated how often my culture was dismissed by my latino brothers and sisters—until I spoke to them in loud, abrupt, perfect Spanish. I told myself that high school was as trivial for everyone—even them. But discussions like this arose outside of school in situations like punk rock shows and family gatherings. These were the settings I irrationally felt respect should have been inevitable. I hated that I allowed trauma to make me put forth so much effort towards reaching an Americanized standard of intelligence. I hated that I allowed my voice to lose an accent I once shared with my family and once deemed as gorgeous. What do we have in common now?

I sought additional ties which helped me feel connected. Two thousand miles away from Miami, I kept feeling the need to prove my heritage, talking in Spanish publicly and proving that there wasn't an accent there either—and in no way was that okay. Because I dreamt and thought in Spanish and often justified how much I had changed since my eleventh birthday.

My voice is made of a need to discredit who I was as a kid. My voice is made of distress, learning from it, and realizing that my voice will ceaselessly evoke the culture it had always intended when I speak two-thousand miles north on the same coastline.

wasn't my outlook in the future-it was something unfathomable eating my energy alive. But I was sad again- and I remembar comparing everything to previous summers. And I hated looking into my friends' eyes and not being able to articulate that it wasn't them. Over the telephone, my mother took it personal and my sister blamed herself.

I tried stress-suppressant herbs and hourly masturbation. The tea tasted bland and the self-inflited orgasms only made my pussy feel great for mere minutes.

Public tranait always re-inspired me. Among the timee life's felt unpromising, I've jumped on a train and regained strength. The Market-Frankford line ran from east to west, and like many people sat in parks to write- I sat on the Market-Frankford line. The seats were cushioned, but I hated the fact that it hardly went above ground while going further east. Exiting the rails was reminiscent of the first time I visited Philadelphia. I paced through brick row houses, corner Laundromats, and trees sporadically placed through south Philly just fresh out of spring. However, the rails failed me for the first time in my life. I took the train back west, then the number thirteen trolley to my front door. I look down at the plastic grass welcome mat my grandmother had bought me on my eighteenth birthday- I went inside and tried to masturbate again.

After that last orgaem, I packed a small backpack and Lacy and I took an early bus to Bloomington, Indiana. There was a big party that weekend where a lot of my friends would be at, and it was summer. I questioned whether or not this was a retreat while carrying dangerous expectations on how I would enact around old friends and lovers. I knew the sinking fssaling- I felt it before I left to new york, when I returned, and on our third layover in Columbus, Ohio.

My first morning there I thought of going to the library and looking up books on manic depression, but I decided to call friends who might understand instead. Most of their phones were disconnected, and at the time I didn't mind because I felt I could find someone to talk to among the six hundred or so who showed up in Indiana that Friday for the saks of summer fun. And alas, manic depression was in no way summer fun- but we needed to move beyond that idealism and start a dialogue.

I did find a caring few. After lunch, I sat with them and cried until my face was as red as my t-shirt. Which actually wasn't much because I now remember that my t-shirt was actually black.

I tried to make light of it then. I talked of the past years' disillusionment about former friends, brawls between close relatives, and earnest goodbyes to people who structured my confidences in the last year. The chaos was sewn to this seams of my every fiber, while breaking free seemed distant. We asked ourselves if what we often did was safe. We would objectively resolve issues, conduct a supportive dialogue and ignore our weaknesses and our ability to cry. We saved our tears for the moments before we slept and days just like this one. We walked

I would take the ocean for granted, I think. Although when it lay beside me, it was often on a day where intercourse between body and spirit was ecstatic.

I had known her for several years and we had gone through a lot of changes together. We sat around the wooden table while she looked at me and said that every girl wants to be skinny. I said that every girl is conditioned to feel she should be skinny. And at some point in the history of human socialization, the standard was created where less skin- to the point of depleting health- constitutes beauty. This was fundamental to our social repression, our weaknesses, and our self-loathing complexes. This was fundamental to our demanding ex-partners and our eating disorders. And knowing this was fundamental to our healing process- our self-love.

The beach was a ten minute bike ride across from my front door. In our town, the sand was as thin as grounded sugar, and the gulf was where we went later that afternoon. Florida was known for its essential tourist attractions of ocean fronts embedded with ecantly clad people baring heavily manicured bodies. I saw a loophole in these visuals. I saw empowerment in wearing as little as we want under the beautiful hot sun. I saw us wearing this clothing for nobody but ourselves. Whereas I knew inside that a woman in a two-piece bathing suit was envisioned as a geographic commodity to the male tourist who saw objects rather than people. And ultimately it was about the peoples' gaze- not only my own. I wish I wasn't so naive sometimes and it was easier to dismantl theess constructs. I wish we didnt have to be skinny in order to show our bodies- love our bodies, nonetheless.

That afternoon, as always, the amount of clothing we wore had more effect on the seaside's institutionalized sexism than we had hoped for. But in the end, we couldn't change socialization, but we could change ourselves- and both revelations and mutual support counted.

She said she didnt love her body. She said she didnt want girls like me to discount her for her weaknessness, so it was always hard to talk to me about her eating disorder.

"What do you mean by girls like me?"

"You know- girls who love their bodies and dont criticize overweight people. Confident girls who got over sizist stereotyping when they started listening to riot grrrl. I'm afraid my eating disorder will prove myself as weak and less empowered than the next feminist." She said to me.

"And sizist commentary does offend me. As blind as I've become towards the weight appropriations of those around me- I do fall flat on what you call strong."

"Maybe we have different interpretations on strength."

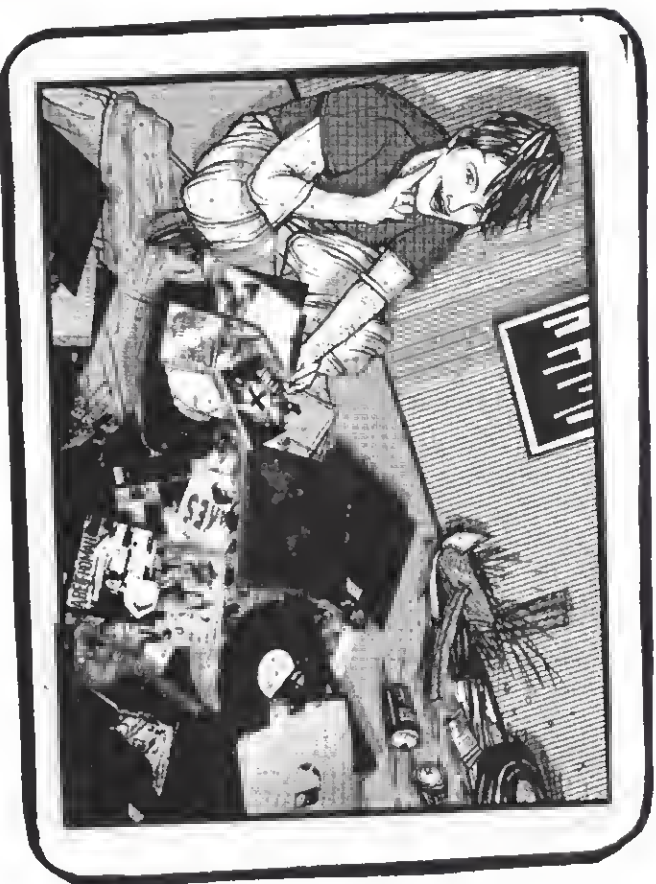
"Maybe we do. I think youre strong. You know you want to heal, despite how winding the road you have to travel is. We all have weaknesses- but I think there is more to us which is what I think makes us strong." I said to her.

I could remember that one morning where I looked in the mirror and questioned what if I fit that etandard. The standard that has tortured us since we became twelve years old and found

She said she wanted to start a band called "Punk Rock Gave me An Eating Disorder." I joked and dubbed myself the redeemer of positive punk rock that can perform as the new cocaine. In the end, my story was either like everyone else's, or unique to the furthest extent. I don't see punk rock as generally redeeming.

Like any subculture, communities reclaim the culture's elements and perfect it to complement our ambitions. I spent enough nights appalled over the fact that varying punk rock communities accepted classism, racism, sexism, and inadvertent elitism that made many of us feel worthless. It was valid when someone chose to dissect themselves from those roots that remind them of a miserable youth.

Albeit, in the end, these were my roots- my antidote- blind or not. And I could say for myself that I was happy then. As much as I can't repel my roots, I continued to learn just as much from the community I've grown a part of in recent years. With growth, the songs stay the same but clinch new meanings. And despite everything, it all boils down to the embrace beneath the yellow street light- and how amazing it felt to be alive on that night.



further to the next block and support from each angle gave me a version of inner strength. I didn't feel sad anymore. But I feared the despair moving stealthily towards me, almost as little as I knew contentment.

Friends often blamed me for spending large bouts of energy towards idealizing any constant that engages me through art and stories. But the truth was that I only wanted to record the emotions that make me stronger- and sixteen days after I left my home for New York city- I realized my life was this enthusiasm or nothing at all. And if they wanted to be my support- they would understand that since birth I had never unfolded a happy medium.

We all sang together to our favorite bands, threw pies at them, and huddled over mass bon fires on rural plains. The following day validated those expectations that I held so dear. But again, I forgot the adverse sides of expectations as they topple over me. And that morning in Indiana, I realized that feeling nothing at all wasn't exactly a disappointment, but hapless misery. I didn't feel hate towards the place I was at, but envied the part of myself that once played the enthusiast. What hits me at transition or when I least expect it is merely just that- the disability to feel anything. And I hated the feeling more than I hated any drama I could express.

On my last day in Indiana, we headed back east with eleven of our friends who were on a summer tour. For those moments, I hardly needed an explanation on mental health, holistic alternatives, and my constant hesitation towards anti-depressants. I needed that Midwestern summer air tickling my skin through the half-opened windows of the van we rode in. I needed everything we could truthfully say we had- concise road maps, a carton of coffee grounds, the consistent singing along to replacement tapes, and each other- en route to Philadelphia.

Through the brick alleyways and northeastern skyscrapers, the faces pacing by welcomed me with inadvertent greetings. It was hot in Philadelphia this summer and it almost felt like Florida- until the sunset when I actually felt a breeze conceal me. I loved this transition and the way west Philly perpetuated summer today. I felt not angry, confused, or detached- but eager. And right now it was something I was going to live with and work with- despite how clinically unnatural it was to jump from disillusion to arousal in a matter of minutes, without a common ground. That afternoon I said I loved every minute of it, but only for now.



I just wanted to be as happy as my
sassy, beautiful friends. And they kept
saying "Honey, you are," and I kept
saying "I want a sandwich and tissues."
Let's stop crying. I reiterated.

the fall following

Things to do before
i move away

- stop watching tv and thinking people actually look this way
- take confidence in my self righteous promiscuity
- have a birthday party
- op on sculcap tinctures
- stock up on capositories
- tell my mom i'm queer
- nevermind that last one
- appologize to Paul
- buy cereal
- eat cereal

Two years back, we threw dance parties in the cryptic two-story wooden house on Myrtle St. The house sat beneath a cluster of tall trees, and it had no lighting on the outside. And although to one another, we were weakened to mere silhouettes while we caroused through the front two steps- the inside was full of character. Kim carved a pumpkin on one side of the floor, and I fried plantains in the kitchen- while alcohol consumption was endowed by every angle. And in mere minutes, the plantains were gone, I slow-danced on the upholstery, and someone took Kim's pumpkin and chucked it across the living room. Kim yelled, someone hid the knife, and almost six of us ended up in the shower clapping to improvised rhymes. I smiled a lot on that night, and Kim snuck out of the shower to retrieve the remaining pieces of her pumpkin. We brought them back into the shower, continued our rhetoric in song, and the story of that night survived through years of rearrangement.

Since then- burning bridges, safer settings, and fresh retreats allowed the house to collapse. None of us have ever moved back there, let alone set a visit aside. And the house remains as just another story to a slew of Florida narratives.

Through the last year, we sat in homes sprawled through each

end of a two

mile road. Our

intentions were

often the same

and we achieved

the utmost in

both debauchery

and construct-

iveness through

the year. And

every night

before I would

pass out

haplessly on

Ben's bed- I

would recollect

the truth that

this year was

the last. But

every morning,

while sex jokes

and sea-sides set

before us- we

knew inside that

at least we

would always

have the memory

of that one

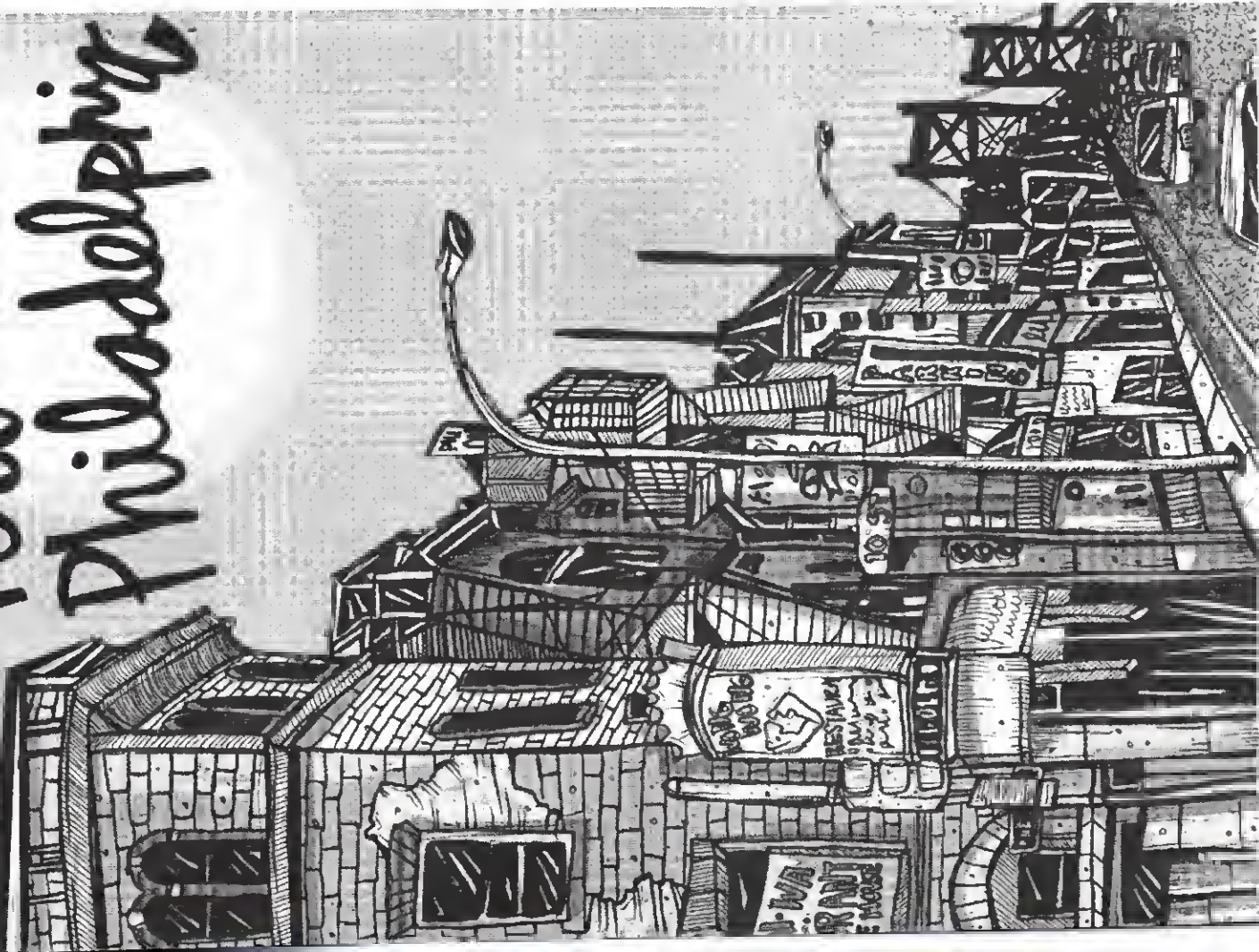
pumpkin.



I had visited Philadelphia January of that year. The snow would fall with every new morning and during that two-day long retreat, I wanted to stay. It had never snowed in my home before. That day at the train station, I felt uneasy, although I rest assured. All this, amidst knowing that in a few short months I could approach that assurance. That assurance came in a square plain with brick corridors pacing the sky. That assurance came in sidewalks paved in sun-struck ice and dirt-tanned piles of snow. It came in row houses that came in the shapes of castles and a heart that came in the shape of solace. It came in the shape of welcoming letters from past lovers, my best friends, and a woman who once stood on the corner of 12th and Arch and told me my haircut was beautiful- three years ago, on a day where I felt completely lost.

I sang to myself a lot that winter- and on the days I awoke communicative, I talked about plans. I had never romanticized plans before- just a lack of direction and the beauty that came with waking up where you least expected. And as beautiful as it was to follow a freight train to the furthest point your heart could take you- saying that I would be a public school teacher and plant an urban garden *now* made perfect sense. That Friday last winter, I had reached Philadelphia at a quarter of eight. The wind was almost tipping me to the side at thirty miles an hour. Inside I said it was only pulling me closer. Then, it was summer and my things were in boxes postmarked "Pennsylvania".

Our Town Philadelphia



Although seasons never truly change in Florida, I remembered how that spring lived up to the stereotype where spring was about sexual rebirth. Sarasota was small and the support and knowledge we developed towards our sexual selves was often hased off of our brains, combined. I was at a learning stage then.

On one night, my friend and I just had orgasms and we layed in the bed in a delicats spoon. The window was open and a breeze brushed our bodies, while I sat paralyzed at a moment where I usually felt beautiful. He asked me why I looked sad and I said that sometimes I wished I had a cock when I had sex with him. I succumbed to a charming performance of being inarticulate.

"So you think you'll ever grow a cock?" He was a stand-up comedian.

"My mom used to tell me I would get anything I truly worked for." I told him in a thick whisper.

Gender identity was an internal struggle for me, and it took me until now to verbalize this. At fourteen, I dismissed punk rock in unison with embracing it. For every moment towards energy, warmth, and belonging there was a moment of patriarchy stabbing me in the front while I stood on the sidelines of a manic crowd. I was unaccepted and failed to pass as the girlfriend of a prominent boy. I, like others, was weak and submitted to the subculture's demands. Ultimately, I didn't want this, I wanted what I had always wanted- I wanted to be a boy. But I never identified with straight boys, and if I was going to play the part of a boy, I might as well play the part of a the hot femme queer boy in my postmodern fantasies. I couldn't hide my queer identity, my desires, and my style- no matter what my gender was.

With this came enclosure and a myriad of feelings I kept to myself. And as much as the latino culture I was brought up in traditionally welcomed a machismo doctrine, my family was entirely composed of women. I grew up within the confines of five Cuban working class women who normalized the deconstruction of gender roles. Despite this, I never talked about my sexual taste to my family while I was a teenager. And I'm twenty two as I write this, and I still havent come out to my mom. But instead of picking my next battle, articulating my gender uncertainty was what I laid on the table on front of me- now that I sat two hundred miles from Miami and my family.

For the last couple of years, I felt I had grown much stronger as a woman. I found people and outlets that helped me feel empowered by my biological identity and I felt great about it. And for a long time, identifying as queer and female with the occasional embrace of hetero intimacy was perplexing, but in most ways- alright.

This year, I made a t-shirt which read "gender is a construct, so fuck it" and I came to terms with the difference between sex and gender.

Last year, I would look in the mirror and adore my female organs. I would look at my partner, and she would look

these last weeks

beautiful. Our intimacy, to me, lacked any power structure. Sex was multifaceted to me, and the part of me that saw the open wounds of sexual abuse justified the abandon of hetero sex acts. Seeing a man and a woman identify as man and woman while they engage in intimacy didn't bother me at all- I was aware of the truth that a coercive power structure could be evident in any relationship, despite statistics and sexual orientation. Heterosexuality wasn't something I condemned as a constant in the lives of those around me, let alone the long-winded friendships I shared with few men- it was something I struggled with as a constant in my wet dreams and daily infatuations.

The dynamic between man and woman is socially ingrained as pitifully unequal- in the media, in the employment line, and in the bedroom. Thinking of this construct while we told each other how much we loved one another's natural odor and body parts was the last thing I wanted.

"Sex which perpetuated hetero norms was the last kind of sex I would give consent to." I told him.

But after the articulating, the charts, and the lists- I felt my plea was often hopeless. Once, a friend of mine talked to me all night about postmodern homosexuality, and the possibility of identifying as queer and female- while males, despite orientation, consistently embrace your intimacy as queer sex.

"The development of bringing queer sex and queer norms into a male and female relationship was completely fathomable, girl."

I thought of this to be thought provoking, although the last moment where you want a concise discussion on post-modern ideas are those where you're totally naked and can hardly imagine letting go. And I seemed to only feel comfortable within the boundaries of a close friend when I was intimate with a boy. I thought of this two nights later at a dance club in Miami- where a woman approached me and before I knew it, we were jean-jammin' on one corner of the club. If this were only possible at the gay club- and it didn't matter that I didn't have a penis.

The morning after he and I had those orgasms, I tried to articulate myself again. My focus shifted from my body to his, his eyes to my pussy, his concern to my despair. I told him sometimes I wished that identifying as a boy when having sex with males would be a normalized practice in an ideal world- and at times, the strap-on that lay beside me might not be enough to create an empowering dynamic with new lovers. He said he felt the same, among more. And I thought sex wouldn't be so difficult if every human dynamic felt like this.

These last weeks were about revelations. They were about change, growth, enlightenment, decomposition, embrace, and punching the kid who tried my homeboy in the face. Two of us would make out on beds of coral while the sun set behind us and we pretended to be rich. Elderly couples watched from behind the veranda. These weeks were about my secret liaison with a woman I adored and my secret daydream where I did the same with my best friend. They were about realizing that sometimes I want to be what I'm not biologically conditioned to be. After these realizations, we would read about post-modern homosexuality and smile at how much we could deconstruct the curbs that restrict romance. Later, we'd brake the restrictions set on me by the landlord, and these weeks were about ecooffing at probation. We would scavenge in the dirt, climb the tallest trees, and find it okay to trample on any of the nearest train tracks- I had never seen so many sunsets.

These last weeks were about grief. They were about slits on my body being visual interpretations about how anguished shit is sometime. They were about recollecting how much it hurt when we saw them slip through our fingers and death took our closest ally. On these last weeks, we supported our friends when they questioned what their bodice were doing to them. At night when they layed beside us- we allowed them to know they're constantly in our minds.

These last weeks were about drunken debauchery and gagging our revelry on the upholstery. Our intoxicated grit allowed us to think we could swim to where the Gulf and the sky met. And our youthful desires gave our accidents character.

These last weeks were about that revelation. The one about the idea of only loving one person being unfathomable. And these last weeks I redefined love.

While we layed in bed and talked and talked about sex and hot dogs- all six of us.



We all sang together and danced together. It was a few days before my birthday and a few days after Ben's birthday. Not a single one of us was sober that night, and in a stupor, our true emotions flickered in a mess on this inept reunion. With every embrace and sixteen minute interlude of dirty dancing- we would question again why we wanted to leave home. The morning after- we

remembered, and transition wasn't as painful as we had thought. At sunrise on that Thursday, I packed my belongings and aligned them in a hatchback while listening to argentine punk rock songs that reminded me of friends and my grandmother. The pace of our bodies on that night was a lot like the pace of adulthood. And for a while, parting was a lot more painful than anticipated. The roads carried out a snowball effect as they grew higher and wider with every mile. And while palms and oaks were haplessly left behind, the past became faint once we crossed the stateline. And I would say to myself that land was progressive- distance is what hurts. We would feel a lot closer if we practiced ignoring the boundaries painted on our folded maps. This is what socialization does to you- and I sure

felt far away now that I was a mile outside of Florida in southeast Georgia.

Outside of the Carolinas, I read a coming of age book about adolescence and having sex for the first time. I thought about the three story house, making pancakes every morning, hitchhiking up north to a place I can truthfully call home, and sharing a common space with three of my favorite women. I reacquainted myself with innocence, and phoned my grandmother to tell her how beautiful the trees in the mid-atlantic were. It was only a few more mountains until west Philly.



I learned to know my body that year.

